
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5154

AN ACT CONCERNING PLANNING REGIONS.

SUMMARY:

This bill extends the deadlines and changes criteria for the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary's analysis of state planning regions. It also sets the goal for the analysis to reduce the number of planning regions from the current 15 to no more than eight.

The bill also extends certain deadlines concerning municipal notification about proposed planning regions.

The bill (1) creates an incentive for areas of the state that contain two or more contiguous planning regions and have at least 14 municipalities to consolidate to form a single regional council of governments or regional council of elected officials by exempting them from redesignation in 2014 and (2) allows the secretary to waive the requirement that the redesignated region contain at least 14 municipalities.

It also makes technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

PLANNING REGION REDESIGNATION

By law, the OPM secretary must divide the state into logical planning regions and redesignate them (by changing the boundaries). There are currently 15 approved regions, but this will change to 14 as OPM recently approved the consolidation of two regions (see BACKGROUND).

Extended Deadlines

The bill extends by two years, from January 1, 2012 to January 1, 2014, the deadline by which the secretary must complete an initial

analysis of boundaries of logical planning regions and notify municipalities in regions slated for redesignation. (The secretary did not complete the initial analysis.)

Under current law, any changes to the regional boundaries are effective on July 1 following the date when the analysis or modification is completed. Under the bill, they are effective January 1, 2015.

Analysis of Boundaries of Logical Planning Regions

Consultation. Currently, the OPM secretary alone is authorized to analyze the boundaries of local planning regions. The bill requires the secretary to consult with the (1) chairpersons and ranking members of the Planning and Development Committee, (2) Connecticut Association of Regional Planning Organizations, (3) Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, and (4) Connecticut Council of Small Towns.

Evaluation Criteria and Reduction of Regions. Under current law, as part of the analysis, the secretary has to develop criteria to evaluate how urban centers affect neighboring towns. The bill instead requires him to examine the boundaries of existing planning regions and develop criteria to evaluate opportunities for coordinated planning and regional delivery of services among urban centers and neighboring towns with the goal of reducing the regions to no more than eight.

The bill also adds three new criteria. First, it adds demographics. Second, it requires a study of traffic patterns in the state's "transportation assets" rather than "major roads," thus including traffic on rail lines and at airports.

Lastly, it requires consideration of any applicable federal requirements when establishing a minimum size for the planning areas. Currently, the planning areas' size is based on the number of municipalities, total population, and total square mileage (see BACKGROUND).

Timelines for Notification of and Municipal Objection to Proposed Redesignation

The bill extends various timelines in the notification and redesignation process.

Current law requires the secretary to notify municipalities about the the planning regions he proposes to redesignate by January 1, 2012. The bill extends the deadline to January 1, 2014.

By law, if a municipality's legislative body objects to the revision, its chief executive officer (CEO) must petition the secretary to attend a meeting with the legislative body to hear its objections. The CEO must do so within 30 days after receiving the notice. The petition must specify the meeting's place, date, and time.

The bill also extends the time for the CEO to propose holding the meeting from no later than 45 days after submitting the petition to 60 days. As under existing law, the secretary or his designee must make every reasonable effort to attend this meeting or a meeting held on another date, which must fall within this period. If the secretary cannot attend the meeting, he and the CEO may schedule the meeting for another date and time, which must fall within 210, instead of 120, days of the secretary's notice to the CEO.

By law, the legislative body must use the meeting to inform the secretary about its objections and the secretary must consider them. Under the bill, the secretary has 60, instead of 45, days to notify the CEO about his decision on the proposed boundary changes. By law, he must state his reasons for the decision.

Forming Newly Designated Regions Before January 1, 2014

The bill creates incentives for areas of the state that contain two or more contiguous planning regions to consolidate to form a single regional council of governments (COG) or regional council of elected officials (RCEO) by exempting them from being redesignated in 2014. The OPM secretary must approve redesignation as such by January 1, 2014. The bill specifies that the new planning regions must have at least 14 municipalities, but allows the secretary to waive the

requirement.

The bill aims to have local governments involved in any newly designated, consolidated regions by permitting COGs and RCEOs and not regional planning agencies (RPAs), which are typically headed by planners who are not elected.

BACKGROUND

Types of Regional Planning Organizations

By law, OPM designates local planning regions within the state (CGS § [16a-4a \(4\)](#)). Within the 15 current regions, the three types of regional planning organizations allowed under Connecticut law are RPAs, COGs, and RCEOs. Through local ordinance, the municipalities within these planning regions have voluntarily created one of the three types of regional planning organizations to carry out a variety of regional planning and other activities on their behalf.

At this time, there are five RPAs, eight COGs, and two RCEOs. But a proposed merger would bring the number of planning regions to 14. OPM has approved a merger of two RPAs, the Connecticut Estuary and Midstate Planning RPAs, into a COG to be called the Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region. Sixty percent of the affected towns must first agree to the change.

Regional Economic Development Districts

A 2010 law allows the three types of regional planning organizations to (1) propose “Regional Economic Development Districts” (REDDs) that the governor designates, (2) prepare strategies to develop them, and (3) apply for state and federal economic development funds. (PA 10-168) It specifies criteria for drawing district boundaries and procedures for preparing, reviewing, and approving strategies. The law permits only eight REDDs to be established in the state.

An approved REDD can request:

1. the Department of Economic and Community Development commissioner to recommend to the governor that he designate

the district as an economic development district and

2. federal designation from the U.S. Department of Commerce as an economic development district, making it eligible for federal economic development grants (CGS § 32-741 et seq.).

Related Bill

sHB 5159, reported favorably by the Planning and Development Committee, gives the OPM secretary two additional years from current law's October 1, 2011 deadline to adopt regulatory criteria for reviewing regional plans of conservation and development.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Planning and Development Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 12 Nay 9 (03/23/2012)